

437 landlords, who would otherwise, apparently, have
 423 been excluded from the cash economy. Such
 [511] money could be spent by the Nambudiri and Nay-
 ar aristocracy on clothing and imported luxury
 goods available in Muslim bazaars in the towns.
 Some Muslims also held kanam lands in villages
 whence they could obtain rice and vegetables.
 Others bought food for cash from Nayar tenants.

[536] Apart from the kanam tenure the use of cash was,
 however, extremely restricted in inland villages,
 and surplus cash was converted into gold orna-
 ments or other objects of ostentation. Among
 [583] the lower castes small coins had a symbolic
 value, and a fixed number were handed over in
 marriage payments, but their use in economic
 exchange among the lower castes appears to have
 been negligible.

434 In spite therefore of the considerable overseas
 554 trade, the complex division of labour, and the
 marked differences in wealth (expressed chiefly
 in size of houses, differences of clothing and
 jewelry, and types of food) between the several
 castes, the overall economy of Kerala in the
 traditional period was relatively stationary, and
 such social mobility as there was, was confined
 to the Muslims, Christians and "good" Hindu
 castes above Nayar retainers. It appears to
 [613] have been this fact which permitted the persis-
 [631] tence of such a relatively rigid feudal system
 and the existence, within each homogeneous local
 caste group, of a lineage system as the main or-
 ganizing principle.

000 (3) Traditional Political Administration

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itself a separate caste. The Cochin lineage claimed descent from the Perumals and ranked as Kshattriyas, the second of the four divisions of all-India Hindu society. The Walluvanad, Palghat, and Calicut lineages, once vassals of the Perumals, were not strictly recognized as Kshattriyas in Brahmin theory and held the title of Samantans. Normally, the oldest man in each royal lineage held the kingship and administered customary law with assistance from Brahman advisers.

Each kingdom was divided into *nāds* (chiefdoms or districts). In the Zamorin's kingdom at the height of its power some of these chiefdoms had once been independent small kingdoms. They were conquered by Calicut in the late fourteenth and the fifteenth centuries. They continued to be ruled by their traditional monarchs, who paid tribute to Calicut. Among them were the chiefdoms of Beypore, Chaliyam, Parappanad, Bettem, and Punnattur. Each of these ruling lineages, although feudatory, retained a higher ritual rank than the Zamorin by virtue of its more ancient tradition of government. Similarly, some chiefdoms of the Cochin kingdom were governed by conquered feudatory rulers of higher ritual rank than the royal lineage. The small kingdoms of Walluvanad and Palghat, however, had no feudatories of higher rank than their royal lineages.

The other chiefdoms of a kingdom were ruled by hereditary Nayar chiefs (*nāduvars*) originally appointed by the king, and these chiefs had more restricted powers than the feudatory monarchs. Most of them held the title of Samantan, but all were considered of lower ritual rank than their royal lineages. The Zamorin's kingdom (the largest) appears to have had twenty-eight such district chiefs in the fifteenth century. Each chiefly lineage, like each royal lineage, tended to regard itself as a separate caste acknowledging no peers.

Each chiefdom was divided into *dēsams* or villages. A village seems to have covered anything from one to four square miles, comprising both dry garden land and flats of alluvial rice land. Most of the land in each village was normally owned by one landlord family of higher ritual rank than the other occupants.

In some villages the land was owned by a Nambudiri patrilineal extended family, whose large house occupied a central position. In others it was owned by one or other branch of the royal lineage as part of the royal domain. There would then be a palace in the village and the senior prince of the household would act as village headman. In other villages the land was owned by the chiefly matrilineage of the district, whether this lineage were of feudatory royal rank or of vassal Samantan rank. Again in this case the chiefly family would live

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lages. The men were often clerks in the palaces. In Cochin, castes 564
two and three were amalgamated and were called Swarupattil Sudra
Nayars or "palace servants."

Fourth, a caste called Pallichan Nayars, both in Calicut and Cochin.
Its members also were vassals in the villages of royalty, chiefs, and
of the greater Brahmans. The men were often palanquin bearers as
well as soldiers.

Fifth, a caste called Sudra Nayars in Calicut and Illath ("Brahman
house") Sudras in Cochin. The members lived in villages owned by
Brahman families or on the estates of Brahmanical temples.

The mutual ritual ranking of these five castes seems to have varied 564
in different districts. In some districts they ranked in the order given, 554 ●
and men of a higher caste might marry women of a lower caste;
the reverse was in theory forbidden. In other districts the castes seem
to have disputed for precedence and not to have regularly intermar-
ried. In most areas the five castes occupied different villages or dif- [628]
ferent sections of large villages, seem to have had little communica- [726]
tion in peacetime, and did not normally interdine. In war, however,
soldiers of these different castes interdined freely and spent the night
in each others' homes. It is possible that sexual restrictions between
these castes were also relaxed in war, but this point is uncertain.

In each village there were normally some four to seven matrilineages 621
of the appropriate retainer caste. The separate households or property 613
groups within each lineage had the hereditary right, granted by the 564
king, to occupy stretches of garden land and to lease large plots of wet 566
paddy land on long-term tenure from the village landlord. The tenure 471
was called *kānam*; the tenant, a *kānakkaran*. In most villages the men of 427
retainer lineages also owed military service to their landlord, ultimately
on behalf of the king. (The military organization is discussed below.)
Retainers were called *adiyar*, a word equivalent to "vassals," of their
landlord. They participated in his household ceremonies and often
waited upon him. Women of retainer lineages could be summoned as
serving maids in the landlord's family; men, as bailiffs to collect the
landlord's rents and organize the labor of his serfs.

The Temple-Servant Castes In addition to the Nayars, other aristo- 564
cratic castes often lived in a village. These were the temple servants, 794
nowadays collectively called *Ambalavasis*. They are relevant to our
discussion because they sometimes married Nayar women. The highest
of these castes were the *Chakkyars* (or reciters of Puranic stories)
and the *Pushpagans* (or flower gatherers for temples), which had
patrilineal descent systems of the same type as the Nambudiris. They

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313 621

lage; and bow makers, each with about one to ten houses per village. Tiyyars, astrologers, washermen, and barbers had double unilineal descent: localized patrilineages with dispersed exogamous matrilineal clans. Artisans and bow makers had patrilineages only.

The polluting castes worked for each other and for the higher castes. Tiyyars held land on a sub-tenure from landlords and Nayar tenants. Astrologers and artisans gave services to the higher castes, to each other, and to the Tiyyars, who ranked above them. Barbers worked for all the higher polluting castes but not for the "good" castes, who employed the Nayar barber. Washermen laundered for all the higher polluting castes but not regularly for the "good" castes, who employed the Nayar washerman. However, the low-caste washerman's lineage owed services to the "good" castes at death, menstruation, and childbirth. Bow makers served Nayars and Tiyyars. Each of the polluting castes was endogamous and interlined only within the caste.

THE LOWER POLLUTING CASTES

On the outskirts of the village, in separate small hamlets, lived the very low castes of Parayas and Pulayas. Parayas were a small caste of basket and umbrella makers. Two or three households had a village right to serve all castes above them. Pulayas were until 1850 the agricultural serfs of Nayars, temple servants, and Brahmans (Buchanan, 1807: 370-372). As highly polluting castes, Pulayas and Parayas were theoretically forbidden to approach the high castes within a distance of sixty-four feet. They might not enter the "good" area of the village or walk on the main paths.

OTHER RELIGIOUS GROUPS

Muslims, called Mappillas, were concentrated in the Zamorin's kingdom, where they followed patrilineal descent. In 1931 they formed about 15 per cent of Kerala's population. Their presence dates from the ninth century, when Arab traders began to make converts, probably mainly from the Tiyyars and the coastal caste of fishermen. From the Arabs and from these converts there sprang a flourishing trading community which increased greatly in the fourteenth century (Logan, 1951, I: 192-197). The Zamorins derived a large measure of their power from the Muslims through taxes and naval support (Ayyar, 1938: 54). Muslims lived mainly in the ports and at inland trading posts on the banks of rivers. They were partly outside the village ranking system, which had its basis in differential land rights, and were theoretically outside the Hindu religious hierarchy. Nevertheless, Muslims were in some contexts accorded a rank ritually and socially between that of Nayars and Tiyyars.

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European trade shook the foundations of the caste system in other ways. Ports grew larger, and within them European merchants employed Christian converts, artisans, and runaway serfs. Near the ports, serfs sometimes became slaves, being torn from their ancestral lands and sold or hired for cash. 439 564 [567]

Nevertheless, until the introduction of steam power in the second half of the nineteenth century, the technology and over-all economy of Kerala did not change very radically. Trade was still limited to surplus crops, luxury goods, and metals. Inland villages remained largely self-sufficient, with the lower castes excluded from cash transactions. Upward mobility was virtually confined to Muslims, Christians, and the Hindu aristocrats above the rank of Nayar retainers. It seems to have been this lack of basic change in the technology which allowed the persistence of a strict, hereditary rank order in villages and, within each homogeneous local caste group, of kinship as the main organizing principle. [375] [177] [554] [177]

War and Law

The traditional period was one of perpetual wars between adjacent kingdoms, interrupted only in the rainy seasons. A royal lineage's strength lay in its monopoly of gunpowder, coinage, and customs dues, its ability to use foreign and Muslim ships for naval warfare, and its control of the royal domains both as a source of produce and of Nayar retainers as soldiers. Through its superior wealth and military power a royal lineage could force feudatory princes and vassal nobles to muster soldiers throughout the kingdom in periods of large-scale war. Each district and each village was classified according to the number of Nayar soldiers it could customarily muster for war. In the Zamorin's kingdom the strength of royal feudatories varied between 18,000 and 1,000 Nayars; of Nayar chiefs, between 5,000 and 100; of village headmen, between about 100 and 25 (Ayyar, 1938: 278). Records of the muster of each feudatory were kept by the Nayar clerks of the palace. The primary duty of each chief was to assemble regularly the soldiers of his district for military exercises at the capital, and in time of war to lead them to battle, with the king himself at their head. Within the district military training was organized on a village basis. This might be done by a Nayar village headman, by the chief himself, or, in Brahman villages, by a Nayar military leader (Asan) who acted for the chief or the king. All Nayar boys of the retainer, village headmen, and chiefly and royal 635 726 613 701 635 634 701 634 702 564

634 376
613 succession to district chiefship and to Kathleen Gough
635 lage headships had to be ratified by the king and he could if neces-
622 sary dispossess disaffected branches and exclude them from office.
726 This was true in the heart of the kingdom. Between Calicut and
Cochin, the Zamorins' perpetual enemy, lay several small chiefdoms
ruled by formerly independent Kshattriya lineages owing only a ten-
uous allegiance to one or the other side. In the perennial wars between
Calicut and Cochin disaffected branches of these lineages frequently
changed sides.

622 Village headmen's lineages, again, had their successions confirmed
635 by the chief or king to whom they owed immediate allegiance. When
634 a property group divided into segments, the tendency seems to have
613 been for the branch having the senior member to retain the ancestral
house, the office, and most of the village domain. The king or chief
sometimes installed a discarded branch of such a lineage in a vacant
office elsewhere, if the office-bearing lineage of that village had died
out. His power to do this rested on the fact that an office-bearing
lineage which was dying out could not adopt without the consent of
the officer of next higher rank. Lopped branches of village head-
men's lineages which lost their domains and office seem to have re-
verted in time to the caste rank of retainer Nayars.

613 In most of the royal lineages and many of the chiefly lineages there
554 existed the institution of *sthānams*. These were titles carrying sepa-
rate estates and sometimes subordinate political offices for the men
next in seniority to the ruler, irrespective of branch. The Zamorin's
lineage had five *sthānams*. The first was the Zamorin who had palaces
at Calicut and Ponnani. Second came a *sthāni* (title holder) who ruled
as chief of Nedunganad, a large chiefdom near the southern bound-
ary whose former ruler had been conquered and executed. The third
sthāni regularly patrolled the southern frontier with an army. The
fourth and fifth had no political offices but lived on separate estates.
The rest of the lineage occupied one or more palaces in Calicut. When
a *sthāni* died, those next below him in age rank all moved up one
place. The ruling lineages of Kolattunad, Walluvanad, and Palghat
each had five *sthānis* and many of the lesser chiefs had two or three.
Cochin had no *sthānis* other than the king, but originally the eldest
male of the lineage retired into celibacy while the second ruled as
[648] king. When the Portuguese came they abolished this rule and installed
the king themselves.

[182] When a ruling lineage was financially and militarily strong, *sthānams*
strengthened its rule and helped it to cohere for a longer time than it
might otherwise have done. They lifted the senior men out of their

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separate segments, gave them economic independence and a share in the government, and made them representatives of the lineage as a whole. If the lineage separated into two or more branch property groups, their estates were managed by their senior men after the sthānis had been removed. The whole lineage might thus cohere for a number of generations. When, however, taxes ran low and the political offices became financially weak, the sthānis had a tendency to revert to the property groups from which they came and, as heads of them, to seek independent rule over a portion of the chiefdom or kingdom. Sthānams were thus an integrative device which developed when a ruling lineage was already strong. They could not maintain its strength if the economic basis of its power was removed, nor could they ultimately prevent disputes of the branches for the central office if the lineage became very large.

RELATIONS BETWEEN ARISTOCRATIC LINEAGES

Each office-bearing lineage had as its enangar one or two higher-rank lineages from the range of those within which its women went to draw visiting husbands. Thus village headmen often had their district chiefs as enangar. A district chief's lineage might have the royal lineage, a conquered royal lineage, or a Nambudiri Brahman family as enangar. The Calicut royal lineage had two conquered royal feudatory lineages as enangar, and some other royal lineages had Nambudiri Brahman families. The enangar fulfilled the usual ceremonial obligations at life-crisis rites, and tied the tālis of girls. Unlike those among the retainer Nayars, these enangar obligations were not reciprocal. A district chief's lineage might thus receive enangar services from royals, but would give them to village headmen. Appropriately, the enangar relationship among aristocrats, like the marriage relationship, was thus asymmetrical. Unfortunately I lack information about whether aristocratic enangar, like those of retainers, had the right to bring to trial offenders against the religious laws of caste.

It is clear that hypergamous marriages and asymmetrical enangar relations were adapted to the potential political and ritual mobility of office-bearing lineages and to the fact that at any given time such a lineage might not be able or willing to acknowledge others as its equals in political or ritual rank. In most situations therefore an office-bearing lineage could act as though it formed a separate caste. There were some contexts, however, in which this was not possible. One of these was adoption. If a lineage was obliged to adopt, it had to find some other lineage whose members it was willing to acknowledge as peers. This problem was usually surmounted by adopting from a lin-

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597 eage with which one was neither at enmity nor in regular asymmetrical political relationships. Thus the Travancore royal lineage several times adopted from Kolattiri, at the other end of Kerala, and the Calicut lineage from Nileswaram, the northernmost independent chiefdom of the Malabar Coast.

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564 The giving and receiving of food, normally a hallmark of caste ranking, presented other problems. Some royal lineages were vegetarians and employed Nambudiri Brahman cooks who, being ritually higher than themselves, were permitted to serve them with food. Others seem to have drawn to themselves a small group of lineages as cooks and houseservants upon whom they conferred equivalence of caste rank, while maintaining them as their social inferiors and not intermarrying with them.

613 RESIDENCE AND KINSHIP RELATIONSHIPS

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593 The property groups of village headmen's and chiefly lineages had residential arrangements similar to those of retainer Nayars, except that their houses were larger. The men of these groups visited their
● 554 lower-ranking wives in the latter's homes. If they lived nearby, visits would occur at night; if at a distance, the husband might visit his wife about once a month and remain for two or three days. Similarly, women of these groups received visits from their higher-ranking husbands at convenient intervals. If he came from a distance the husband brought his own servants and cook, occupied a building near the taravād house, and stayed at his conjugal family's expense.

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592 In the royal lineages each property group occupied a large palace. Within it each princess had her own suite of rooms in company with her children under the age of fifteen. Princes over this age had private rooms in a separate wing. The Nambudiri Brahman husbands of princesses (who were younger sons in their own households and had no managerial duties) lived at the palace for the duration of their marriages and were maintained at its expense. In the daytime they occupied a building within the royal courtyard, with its own bathing pool, kitchen, and servants, and visited their wives' rooms mainly at night. Junior princes visited their wives in nearby retainers' households or in more distant chiefly taravāds. Each royal sthāni had his own palace, estate, and retainers for the duration of his office. He would normally bequeath a house to a Nayar wife within the palace grounds and visit her and his children there.

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[586] Although group marriage appears to have existed in theory among aristocrats, polyandry was in fact perhaps less common than among retainer Nayars. Princesses are said to have been sometimes poly-

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androus and divorce was freely practiced, but a princess probably did not regularly entertain more than one husband at a time. Older Nambudiri Brahman husbands often introduced their own younger kinsmen into the palace; for this reason both matrilineal cross-cousin marriage and paternal parallel-cousin marriage were common in Brahman-royal unions. Princes, chiefs, and high-ranking Nambudiri Brahmans were sometimes polygynous. Their wives, however, were probably seldom polyandrous; for aristocrats seem often to have exercised the power to monopolize the attentions of their favorite Nayar wives. They were therefore more sure of the paternity of their Nayar sons, upon whom they sometimes conferred military or political offices.

In an hypergamous unions the husband observed the normal all-India caste rules of pollution except with regard to sexual intercourse. He might not receive food from his wife's caste and had little communication with her or her children in the daytime. Affinal relationships were correspondingly more restricted than in the retainer castes for a woman had very little communication with her husband's natal kin; she and her children used no kinship terms for them. If the wife was of lower social as well as ritual rank than the husband she did not visit his natal home. Conversely, princesses do not seem to have demeaned themselves socially by visiting the homes of their ritually higher-ranking husbands. A Nayar wife who was of similar social rank to her Brahman or temple-servant husband might occasionally visit the womenfolk of his home, but she was received in an outbuilding and might not eat with them. Similarly, husbands in hypergamous unions had highly formalized and restricted relationships with the matrilineal kinsmen of their wives. The wives' elder kinsmen were accorded the respect due their age; the husband, that due his superior ritual rank.

Relationships between matrilineal kin among the aristocrats were a sharpened version of those found among retainer Nayars. Between men, the etiquette associated with age rank was highly stereotyped. Among the senior princes who were likely to compete for political office it reached the point of avoidance, a condition facilitated by their separate residences as *sthānis*. The etiquette of respect was similarly elaborated between men and women. After the age of fifteen a prince might converse with older women of his palace only by appointment and in some public place. He must scrupulously avoid the presence of younger kinswomen from the time of their *tālī* rite. In the potentially larger property groups of the aristocrats these rules of etiquette obviously militated against the expression of aggression between men as well as preventing incestuous relations between the sexes.

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like the cult of lineage ghosts, are non-Sanskritic. I discuss the three categories of cults in that order, and then refer briefly to modern changes in the cults.

THE CULT OF LINEAGE GHOSTS

769 Each traditional Nāyar house contains a room devoted to lineage ghosts. Within the shrine are placed small, low stools (*pīthams*). On each of these it is believed that a particular ghost comes to sit on the days when offerings are made.

769 In property groups of the aristocratic lineages of village headmen and district chiefs, which own more land than do commoner Nāyars, family histories recorded in palm leaf documents may contain the names and achievements of twenty or more *kāranavans* extending back over two or three hundred years. In such lineages, whose property groups divide less frequently than do those of commoner Nāyars, the *kāranavans'* spirits are housed in a special building in the courtyard south of the ancestral house. Commoner Nāyars care somewhat less for their ancestry. Sometimes they have only three or four stools for their lineage ghosts and remember by name only those who died within the last hundred years or whose lives were in some way remarkable. Remarkable *kāranavans* are those who fought bravely in battles or received honor from chief or king, those who earned property on behalf of their matrilineal groups, or those who died prematurely through accident, murder, epidemic or suicide.

769 Regular offerings are made only to *kāranavans*, for only *kāranavans* hold legal authority and only their names tend to appear in documents which survive for posterity. On the advice of the astrologer, however, a *taravād* may, in emergency, propitiate the ghost of an ancestress or of a man who died before becoming *kāranavan*. But such ghosts are always those who died within the lifetime of living members.

769 The lineage ghosts are regularly propitiated⁶ on the new moon days of Karkidagam (July-August) and Tulām (October-November). Food is cooked in the kitchen by women of the matrilineal household, and a large portion is placed on a plantain leaf for each of the ghosts. It includes curried meat and vegetables, fried paddy, beaten rice, fruits, and sweet puddings of various kinds. Toddy and arrack were traditionally served along with the meal. If a dead *kāranavan* is known to have enjoyed special foods during life, he receives a large portion of these foods. Occasionally, even in the past, individual Nāyars have been vegetarians. The spirits of vegetarian *kāranavans* may not be served with meat and are housed in a separate shrine. When the dishes are prepared, they are carried quickly to the shrine so that the ghosts may partake of their essence before others have tasted or smelled them. The living *kāranavan* places the leaves before the stools in the presence of men junior to him in the property group and then closes the door of the shrine. Age-rank is observed in making the offerings. For each spirit, in addition to its own leaf, is briefly offered the food later placed before the stools of spirits junior to it. Similarly, the vegetables of vegetarian ghosts are first offered to meat eaters who were senior to them, and the vegetables (but not the meat) cooked for meat eating ghosts are first offered to vegetarian ghosts who were their seniors. After a few minutes the *kāranavan* reopens the door and distributes the food, to be eaten by all members of the *taravād*. Women take no part in offering the food and may not enter the ancestral shrine on this day. They are also forbidden to enter it during menstrual and birth pollutions, and all members are forbidden entry during the fifteen days of pollution following a death.

Traditionally, at the close of offerings to the ghosts, men of the *taravād* might

the mouth of this pot with a piece of new cloth, and, all following the eldest who carries it, proceed to the nearest river (it must be running water), which receives the remains of the dead. The men then bathe and return home. In some parts of Malabar the bones are collected on the seventh day, but it is not orthodox to do so. Better by far than taking the remains to the nearest river is it to take them to some specially sacred place, Benares, Gâya, Ramêsvaram, or even to some place of sanctity much nearer home, as to Tirunelli in Wynâd, and there dispose of them in the same manner. The bones or ashes of any one having been taken to Gâya and there deposited in the river, the survivors of the Taravâd have no need to continue the annual ceremony for that person. This is called "Ashtagâya Shraddham." It puts an end to the need for all earthly ceremonial. It is believed that the collection and careful disposal of the ashes of the dead gives peace to his spirit, and, what is more important, the pacified spirit will not thereafter injure the living members of the Taravâd, cause miscarriage to the women, possess the men (as with an evil spirit), and so on.

Then on the fifteenth day after death is the purificatory ceremony. Until this has been done, any one touched by any member of the Taravâd should bathe before he enters his house or partakes of any food. A man of the Athikkurisi clan officiates. He sprinkles milk oil in which have been put some gingelly seeds (all together) over the persons of those under pollution. This sprinkling and the bath which follows it removes the death pollution. The purifier receives a fixed remuneration for his office on this occasion as well as when there is a birth in the Taravâd.

In the case of death of a senior member of a Taravâd, well-to-do and reckoned as of some importance, there is the feast called Pinda Atiyantaram on the sixteenth day after death, given to the neighbours and friends. The word neighbours, as used here, does not mean those who live close by, but, owing to the custom of Malabar under which each house is in its own paramba (garden or enclosure) which may be a large one, those of the caste living within a considerable area round about. I am not sure whether in connection with these ceremonies there is mutual assistance in preparation for the funeral; or whether there is any recognized obligation between members of the same amsham, dêsam or tara; or whether this kind of mutual obligation obtains generally between any Taravâd and those of caste round about, irrespective of its boundaries.

Men and women who have taken part in the festival are considered to have undergone spiritual purification each in his or her own caste, and to have marked their position in it as well as in the social scale.

Beyond noting that the weirdness of the human tumult busy in its religious effusion is on the last night enhanced by fireworks, mere description of the scene of the festival will not be attempted, and such charming adjuncts of it as the gallery of pretty Nāyar women looking on from the garden fence at the seething procession in the lane below must be left to the imagination for the present, while we must be content with such accuracy as we may attain on all points: neither fancy nor beauty shall allure us from the dull path of precision, for the mere features of the ceremonial are one real concern.

It will have been noticed that the Nambūtiris hold aloof from the festival: they purify the temple before and after, but no more.

The importance attached to the various offices of those who are attached to the temple by however slender a thread, was illustrated by a rather amusing squabble between two of the Mukkuvans (fishermen), an uncle and nephew, as to which of them should receive the silver umbrella from the temple and bear it to the house of the goldsmith to be repaired. How the squabble arose, how indeed there could have arisen a squabble on such a point as seniority between an uncle and a nephew amongst Mukkuvans, whose descent is reckoned from father to son, I know not, but during the festival one of them made a rapid journey to the Zamorin (about 50 miles distant), paid some fees and established himself as the senior who had the right to carry the umbrella. There are points of resemblance between this festival and the village festival of Southern India where the buffalo "devoted" to the goddess of the village is sacrificed, where there is the slaughter of the lamb by the strong teeth of a man, the dressing up in leaves, the man naked and blindfolded going round outside the village while cooked rice and blood are scattered wide, the blindfolded man falling senseless before the goddess at the end of it.*

There are many festivals in Malabar description of which would be very interesting, but information in detail is wanting in my notes, so I must perforce rest content with what has been related of the festival at the

* Described at length by me in the "Journal of the Anthropological Society of Bombay" some eight years ago.

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cast off one husband and choose another, the religious rites of marriage had to be performed without any definite marital relationship with any particular man. This seems to be the explanation of *Talikettu Kalyanam*.

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The real marriage *de jure* and *de facto* is the *Sambandham*. "*Sambandham*" is a Sanskrit word, meaning good and close union. A Nayar girl can have *Sambandham* not only with a Nayar man, but with Brahmins and Kshatriyas. As a matter of fact the whole system of Nayar customs seems to have been regulated to suit the purpose of the Nampudiri Brahmins. It must be remembered that a very strict system of primogeniture is prevalent among the Nampudiris, and only the eldest male member in a Nampudiri family marries from among his own caste. Only in case the eldest has no issue, or is incapable of having any, is it that one of his brothers gets the chance to marry in his own community. Generally, therefore, the younger sons of a Nampudiri family marry among the Nayars. It must also be remembered that it is considered an honour reserved only for the highest Nayar families to be allied to Nampudiri families by marriage.

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The *Sambandham* customs are of the simplest nature. If the suitor is a Brahmin he goes and tells the *Karnavan* of his desire to marry the girl. The *Karnavan* then consults the astrologer for an auspicious date, and informs the village elders. The Brahmin brings some *Pudakas* (i.e., clothes which the wife wears) and hands them over to the girl in the presence of her relations and the neighbours, and it is duly announced that they are married.

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If the suitor is a Nayar he is generally the girl's father's sister's son. As we have said before, this is considered to be the most proper marriage. In this case it must be remembered the head of the suitor's family approaches the girl's uncle with a proposal that such marriage is eminently desirable, and the *Karnavan* informs all the necessary people, and the *Pudaka* is given without much ceremony. It is when a stranger wants to marry in the family that all the formalities have to be gone through. Then all the village and all people in any way related are informed and, in the case of rich families, invited to a feast on the auspicious day. After an elaborate and sumptuous meal the village headman and family elders assemble in a hall. A lighted lamp is placed in the middle, and before it a plantain leaf with rice, betel-nut, lemons and spices. The bridegroom is ushered in here nearly half an hour before the ceremony, and he comes accompanied by some members of his family and the chief men of his village. There is a sort of social reunion for some time, and when the auspicious moment arrives, the bride, accompanied either by her mother (or, in some parts, by her mother's brother's wife) enters and approaches the bridegroom. In ordinary cases the bridegroom stands up and takes the clothes which some of his party had brought for him and gives them to the bride. In some cases the uncle of the bridegroom gives them to the mother of the girl.

The ceremony is now supposed to be over. The bride retires with her mother, and for some time a general conversation, including sometimes recitals of odes,

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Dr. Marett himself has, with great truth, insisted on as the essence of religion.¹ I have called such practices magical, not only because they lack the emotional and the psychological elements of religion, but also because the fundamental presupposition in such performances is the power wielded by the magician, the "*orenda*" which he has acquired, over the ghosts.

This is very clear from the Nāyar ideas of *Thēvar* and *Pisāchu*. *Thēvar* can be propitiated but never conquered; while a *Pisāchu* (or ghost), though superior to man in power, intelligence and will-to-do-harm, can be rendered harmless and kept under control by magical practices. The former conception is clearly Hindu and relates only to Hindu gods. The spiritual ideas of the Nāyars themselves seem to be confined to ghosts, spirits, and to a comic elf called *Kutti-Chāttan*.

Before we proceed to consider them, the position of the magician in the Nāyar community has to be made clear. It is generally taken for granted by anthropological writers that wherever social life is regulated by magical practices the *Shaman* comes to be held in reverence. It is very interesting, therefore, to notice that the Nāyars never accepted the superiority of the magician, and never accorded him any privilege. The magico-medicine man is, on the other hand, considered to be a sort of servant-in-attendance on a nobleman's family, something like a family doctor. The explanation that it is due to the warlike character of the Nāyars is clearly inapplicable, as the magician attained kingly powers among the Masai, for example, whose society is also organised for purposes of war. The fact that the *Kāniyān* (or the magico-medicine-man) is not only not venerated, but actually considered an inferior, may be more due to the effect of caste-system, which places Nāyars high among the social scale.

The *Kāniyān* is, of course, recognised as a necessary person. He gets from all the houses of the village settled remuneration, mostly in coco-nuts. He is not otherwise paid for ordinary consultation, and he is bound to attend to every case in the village without fail. For special exertions of his magical powers he has special payments settled by village custom. He has power, both inherited and acquired, to cast-off spirits, to perform preventive magic, and keep general control over ghosts.

There are supposed to be three kinds of spirits, *Prētam*, *Bhutam*, and *Pisāchu*. A *Prētam* is the spirit of a dead man. The ghosts of men who died in the ordinary course of events are not really *Prētams*, because they do not wander about to overpower people and drink their blood. It is generally the ghosts of men who died as a result of foul play, or by accidents such as drowning, or by terrible diseases such as smallpox and cholera that wander about at nights. A *Bhutam* is seen generally in marshy districts and does not always hurt people unless they go very near him. A *Pisāchu* is a general spirit of the air causing such diseases as smallpox. All these

¹ Threshold of Religion: Essays on Pre-animistic Religion, the Birth of Humility, and Its Tabu negative magic?

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CHAPTER I.

—:O:—

THE SUDRAS OF COCHIN.

—:O:—

A. THE HIGH CASTE SUDRAS (NAYARS).

THE NAYARS are an interesting caste of people, forming a considerable portion of the population of the

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Cochin State; they constitute the third and last of the honoured castes under the name of the pure "*Sudras of Malayala*". They were mostly nobles who engaged neither in handicraft, nor in commerce, nor in any other occupation but that of arms, which they always carried; and no one could be called a Nayar who was not of noble lineage. They were in fact the magnates of the rulers of Kerala, and exercised as much authority over their inferiors as their rulers did over them. They formed in ancient times a warlike race with military leaders and civil administrators of all kinds. Very much influenced as they are by modern civilisation, their customs widely differ from those of other people, in marriage, family and social organizations, as also in maternal filiation. These customs, which are primitive, are being tenaciously retained by them; and they are even now, as they have always been, a unique people whose customs may appear peculiarly strange to foreigners.

The word *Nayar*, which is the honourific plural of *Nayan*, is derived from *Nayaka*, which means a leader of the people; and the name, which in the widest sense at present includes a large number of sub-castes quite distinct from one another, may have been given by a class of Brahmans called the Nambuthiris¹ to the Nayars proper, who formed a military class in ancient times. Some consider it to be more correct to derive *Nayars* from *Nagas* (snakes or snake-worshipping Nagas or Scythians) from the worship of the Nagas or snakes which has been the characteristic cult of the community.

1. See account of the Nambuthiris.

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13. *Anduran Nayars*.—These Nayars are the manufacturers of earthenware for use in temples.

14. *Attikurusi Nayars*.—They are the priests who officiate at funeral ceremonies for all sub-castes above them.

In respect of the fourteen subdivisions of the high caste *Sudrás*, it must be said that the non-military classes, namely, the Otattu Nayars, Chempukotti, Anduran, Pallichán and Vattékád Nayars, have to be treated as an intermediate class of *Sudrás*, because there is neither interdining nor intermarriage between the members of these subdivisions and those treated as high caste *Sudrás*; but they are classed among the high caste *Sudrás* on account of their services in temples, which give them the privilege to enter them and bathe in public tanks.

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Under the head of low caste *Sudrás* are included four sub-castes, namely Tharakans, Velakkathalavans, Veluthédans, and Cháliyans, who pollute other Nayars by touch, and who are on that account called low caste *Sudrás*. Pollution by touch appears to be the basis for the above classification, and on this principle, the three castes except the Tharakans are treated as low caste *Sudrás*; for, their touch pollutes all castes above them. The Tharakans had been a trading class, but they have now taken to other professions. They are a Tamil class and are the least Malayáli to be brought on a level with the high caste *Sudrás*, though in their customs they are almost like the latter. A similar process of assimilation has been and is still going on among some of the Tamil castes of the Chittur Taluk as well as elsewhere, by which the members of such castes are developing themselves into Nayars.

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The Nayars affix to their names one of the following titles, the origin and significance of which are given below:—

1. *Kartha*.—The word means a 'doer', and appears to have been used as a title by some of the old Madura kings. The rulers of Cochin are said to have confirmed this title on some influential Nayar families, and made them petty chieftains subject to their paramountcy. All the Karthás belong to the *Illam* division of the Nayar caste. Among the old families in the Cochin State still possessing this title are Chéránellur [551] Kartha near Ernakulam, Kódasséri. Kartha near Chálakudi, and Kuzhupilli Kartha.

2. *Kaimal* (from *kai*, hand, meaning power).—The Kaimals were, according to tradition, the fighting masters of Cochin and Malabar. At one time, they were in charge of the royal treasury, which by respected custom could not be visited by the Rajas themselves, except in the presence of the Kaimals. "Neither could they," says Barbosa, "take anything out of it without a great necessity, and by the council of this person and certain others." They were also the chieftains or rulers of certain localities, owing a kind of allegiance to the ruler of the State. Many of the Kaimal families are still in existence, such as the Koratti Kaimal, Cherukayil Kaimal and others. 533 554 (244)

3. *Kurup*.—This is also a title attached to the names of many Nayar families and is also assumed by other castes. Some of them were military instructors (Kalari Kurups) in the old royal families of Cochin and in North Malabar.

4. *Panikkar*.—The word comes from *pani*, meaning work. The Panikkars originally kept *kalaris* (fencing or gymnastic schools with a sort of private chapel attached to it) in Cochin, Malabar and Travancore. They are spoken of by the Portuguese writers as the strength of the country. They are no longer in charge of *kalaris* but are now engaged in other occupations. Some are experts in sword play. (874)

5. *Nayar*.—The Pathináyirathil (10,000), and Muppathináyirathil (30,000) Nayars who constitute the forty thousand belonged to the Kiriya and Chárna castes. The title was generally conferred in Malabar by kings or feudal chiefs, but in the State it was mostly assumed by the Sudrás who had not received other titles.

6. *Menon*.—The word is a contraction of *mél*, above, and *avan*, he, and means a superior person. The title was given to many Nayar families or individuals by the rulers of Cochin. As soon as a person received this title, he was presented with an *ála* (palmyra leaf) and an iron style for writing thereon. This is symbolical of the profession of an accountant. Even now, in Cochin and British Malabar, each *amsom* or revenue village has a writer or an accountant who is called a Ménón. The title of *Mendókki* means one who looks over or superintends, and is found only in British (457)

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●554 Malabar, where it is a creation of the Zamorin.

7. *Asin*.—The word means a teacher. He is also a head-man (*Karayinnēl Asin*), who has certain social functions in connection with the marriage and other ceremonies.

8. *Achan*.—The word means father. It is the title of the Palghat Rajas, the ministers of the Calicut and Cochin Rajas (*Māngāt Achan* and *Pāliyat Achan*), and also of several other old Nayar chiefs.

9. *Mannḍiṭṭiṭṭar*.—This is the title of certain aristocratic families in the Chittur Taluk near Palghat. The word is derived from *man*, earth, and *nēṭiyavar*, earners.

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Among the high caste Sudras marriage is hypergamous, while the low caste Sudras are endogamous.

Marriage prohibitions.

This is the general rule, though exceptions may sometimes be found. A Nayar is allowed to cohabit with a woman lower in the social scale than himself, but his womenkind are prohibited from exercising the same liberty. This is called the *Anulōmam* and *Prathilōmam*. Dr. Gündert derives *Anulōmam* from *Anu* with *lōmam rōmam* the hair, going with the hair or grain. So *Prathilōmam* means going against the hair or grain. According to this usage, a Nayar woman, consorting with a man of the higher caste, follows the hair, purifies the blood, raises the progeny in social estimation. By cohabitation with a man of lower subdivision, clan or caste, she is guilty of *Prathilōmam*; and if the difference of caste were admittedly great, she would be turned out of her family to prevent the whole family being boycotted.

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The rule of *Anulōmam* and *Prathilōmam* is everywhere observed with great strictness. In many cases, Nambuthiris, Embrāns, Pōttis and Tamil Brahmins, Kshatriyas and

1. Alliances between the people of North Malabar and South Malabar seem to be extremely rare. It is partly because of the principle of *Prathilōmam* and perhaps partly that the Nayar women cannot cross the *Korapuzha* which marks the boundary between the two. Nor can the women of the extreme north of North Malabar cross the river between it and South Canara. The reason is said to be that the *Kolathiri Raja* so commanded owing to the fear that was entertained about their being captured and taken as wives by the Arabs. Similarly, till about fifty years ago the Nayar women from North Travancore and Cochin were prohibited from going beyond Quilon southward. These customs are being overlooked by the educated members of the community and it may almost be said that the custom has begun to die out.

Further, in the extreme south of South Malabar a high caste bride mates with a low caste bridegroom on the *Prathilōmam* already explained. The husband cannot touch her without pollution, when she is engaged in taking meals. In the case of Nambuthiris, the same custom is in force and they cannot be seen while engaged in religious ceremonies or taking meals. With the spread of education, official status, wealth, power, and influence, many of these time-honoured customs are fast disappearing.

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[554] circumstances of his matrimonial life. If however he do so, his family and society will not recognise it as such, and no woman of any respectability will enter into such an alliance.

586 According to the customary rules of *sambandham*, the relationship between husband and wife, ceases at the will and pleasure of either party; but in practice, such dissolution of marriage is of rare occurrence. The woman generally does not leave her husband, while the man may send her away

[613] whenever he chooses to do so. Marriage can be dissolved only with the consent of the *kīranavans* or the other elders of the family. There are certain formalities to be observed in this connection, which vary in detail in different places, but some secret act indicating the intention of repudiation seems necessary before the divorce. In the event of the husband trying to effect a separation from his wife, he sends two or three respectable men to give intimation to the *kīranavan* of the wife's family setting forth his reason for so doing. If the wife wishes to terminate the *sambandham*, she brings it to the notice of the *kīranavan*, and with his consent tells the husband in the presence of her relatives the reasons for discarding him. In the northern parts of the State, especially in the Chittur Taluk, the prevailing custom is to send for the husband and two of the fellow caste-men and to declare the reluctance of the woman to continue as wife, in the presence of these men. In some cases, instead of the formal declaration of the dissolution of marriage, certain conduct on the part of the parties is tantamount to such a declaration, such, for instance, as the failure by the husband or his family to send the usual presents to the family of the wife for *Onam*, *Vishu* and *Thiruvithira*, the refusal of the wife's people to accept them when sent, the failure to pay for wife's sustenance attended with deliberate omission to visit her, the deliberate absence for three consecutive nights with the consent of the elders from her husband's room. As a rule, no dissolution is allowed unless the cases for the same are enquired into and discussed by guardians and relations. Though a woman is free to marry and to dissolve the union, yet, as a rule, she never does so. The fear of social disgrace and self interest stand in the way of a woman's attempt to separate from her husband. In Cochin as well as in South Malabar, the women

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only training was the training of the memory, and the learned pedagogue never bestowed a thought on cultivating the thinking powers or the originality of his pupils. But this type of school and school-master is fast disappearing under the modern regime of elementary schools. [872 876 78]

Next in importance to the school-master is the Kaniyan, an indispensable factor in the affairs and ceremonies of the village.¹ [79 554]

Then come the artisan classes whose services are necessary in the construction of houses, and the making of implements of agriculture. They were paid for their work either in kind or in coin. [564]

The other men of importance in the village economic life were the physician, the village washerman, and the village barber. The village physician was a man of parts: for, not only did he tend the sick and the ailing, but also cast out devils from persons possessed, and with the aid of well prepared charms guarded them from the effects of the evil eye. The village washermen were of the Veluthédan and the Mannán caste. The services of the former were always requisitioned when people wished to become free from pollution, an act the omission of which leads to outcasting. [759 79 787]

The village barber is another indispensable factor in the village ceremony and is employed for the shaving before all ceremonies. His privileges cannot be encroached upon by his own caste-men from other villages. [565]

The village organisation above described is preserved to a certain extent even now and most probably the Kaniyan's profession will survive all other relics of Hindu institutions, as his services are considered to be of essential importance in matters of every day life. [62 182 79]

The ordinary games pursued by the young men of the village are the foot-ball matches, *Attakalam*, *Kayyámkali*, and *Kaikottikkali* (a favourite circular dance of the women), *Ushinjál* and others, while cards and chess are common enough on festive occasions. Cock-fighting is an interesting pastime among the lower classes. [526 571 554]

The most important of the village pastimes are the dramatic performances, a description of which is given in the following pages. The drama in Malabar sprang into being in [536 538]

1. Vide my account of the Kaniyans, Vol. I, Chap. XI, pages 190-93.

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intermittently blown. Such are the crude theatrical properties which the actor has to face.

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At about eight o'clock begins the *Thodayam purapad*, consisting of songs which are meant to initiate the audience into the mysteries of the plot. But this takes place behind the

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drop curtain, which has not yet been drawn up. Next comes the *Vandanalokam*—a song in propitiation of some particular god—and then begins the play. The actors perform only by means of dumb-show, and the music is provided by the singers who, though invisible, are close at hand. All changes of thought, feelings, and emotions are conveyed by means of gestures of which there are said to be sixty-four different kinds, and in the commingling of these, lies the skill of the actor. Inhuman and unchivalrous acts, such as chopping off the noses and breasts of women, are usually enacted behind the scenes; though, in certain cases, these are made realistic by the characters to be victimised wearing false noses and breasts.

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It is not until the dawn of day that the play ends. The cost of a night's performance is only about fifteen rupees, while the cost of all the stock in trade is often less than 400 rupees.

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A special innovation in this direction was made by the Valia Kovil Tampuran of Travancore and others who translated a few of the most important Sanskrit dramas. They introduced a real improvement in the construction of the stage and scenery, as also in the mode of dress, the style of music, and the method of acting, all of which were changes for the better. Dramatic companies were organised in many places where the plays were acted. They were at first very popular, but most of them disappeared as they did not play; but yet poets and versifiers still continue their work of producing plays for the stage.

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Mohiniyattam.—This is an institution, very much like the nautch of the East Coast. A leader (*Netturan*) obtains the service of two or three young girls of low birth and trains them for the performance. He takes the girls from house to house, gets a paltry allowance for each day's performance, and thus makes a living. The performance is usually acted at night, when the girls, dressed in the gaudy attire, are led by the *Netturan* in an amorous dance. This is an abominable institution, and the women who are thus rented out are looked

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upon with contempt. It must be noted that they live separately, having little or nothing in common with the other classes, and that the institution is dying a silent and natural death.

Songs.—There have been very many songs current among the Nayars even from a very remote period; and they are chiefly composed and sung in honour of deities, and are mostly prayers addressed to them. A translation of these is not here attempted, for they lose much of their beauty, but the following, however, are the most important of them:—

Bhadrakali Püttu:—These are songs which are sung in honour of Káli, and are supposed to have been composed by the Sudras of Palghat long before the Malayalam era. Certain dramatic songs also appear to have been composed about the same time, and refer to the deities on the hills as well as to the kings of the period. They are sung in towns and villages, between Anamala and Trichur in the east, and the Walayar forests on the other side. The ancient name of these localities was Cheranad, and it was the first place to be occupied by people, when Kerala was a marshy tract. As evidence of this, remains of houses are still to be seen at the foot of the hills. In a place of such historic importance were composed and sung these songs, which are so full of the ideas of the Vedānta and Yoga philosophies, and which give a clue to the nature of the people who once lived there. There is also another variety of songs referring to *Dārikavadham*, (murder of the demon Dārikan), and they are sung by a class of men called the *Kurippans*. There are also other old songs such as the *Sāta püttu* (songs in honour of Sāsta).

Ganapati püttu (songs in honour of Ganapati) and serpent songs:—Among the old songs, those referring to agriculture, and composed during the third century of the Malayalam era, occupy a prominent place, and the agriculturists of the northern parts of the State even to-day follow the precepts laid down in these songs. But excepting, the song commemorating the deeds of *Meppayil Kunji Othenan*, the Robinhood of North Malabar, there are no songs which sing of the deeds of brave men.

The chief festivals.—(1). *Onam*:—This is an important national festival, which falls in the second half of August or the first half of September, and is celebrated in commemoration of Mahābali, an *Asura* king, whose reign is believed

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children regard this picture of Prabaty Amma as that of their ancestress through their father. It appears from this symbol, combined with the frequent visits of their father's sisters and their children, that the father's matrilineal kin are conceptualized as if they were that of the mother. This tendency is greater in the case of the wife and children of 32, which I think largely derives from the fact that 32 is playing the role of the central figure of the Pula Sambantham of his matrilineal group, and that his wife is a member of Mangayil *tarwad*, which is one of the important and close affinal matrilineal groups to Marayil members: the mother's brother and brother of 32's wife also married with members of Marayil 26 and 56.

In spite of the inclination of these children towards their father's matrilineal group, and paternal authority being well established, they still maintain the surname of the male members of their mother's matrilineal group.¹ In Trivandrum the Nayar said to me it depended on the individual free choice whether one should take the father's surname or the mother's brother's: in fact, I found some of them taking their father's surname. However, among the Nayar in Ernakulum, all they are taking mother's brothers' surname and they are proud to do so.

The greater approach of the children to their father's matrilineal group seems to me largely due to their father's important status in his matrilineal group, the members of which live very near to him, combined with his distinguished economic activities, which make him maintain closer contact with his matrilineal kin. For example, if 32 was not the central figure in his matrilineal group, and poor, and on the other hand his wife had a very wealthy uncle to help her now and then, his wife and children might have more attachment to their mother's matrilineal kin, rather than to the father's.

In such a transitional stage, including the earlier stage of the disintegration of the *tarwad* as already discussed, a man has two orientations, to his matrilineal group and to his elementary family. And a man stands balanced between the two groups, differentiating his role according to the circumstances in which he is involved. In this situation to decide a man's behaviour the given law seems less effective than the actual situation in which an individual is involved. 36 who married and once resided in his wife's *tarwad*, later returned to his own *tarwad*, taking the role of a *karanavan* of his old *tarwad*. He said that he felt his need as a guardian for his sister's children, as there was no grown up male member in this *tarwad* building; but he did not mind leaving his wife and grown-up daughters and sons behind. This case should be compared with the case of Nando Pillai who lived his later life with his wife and children, though he was the legal guardian (*karanavan*) of his *tarwad*.

¹ Among Nâyars, traditionally the surname is used for only male members of a *tarwad*, while female members are called by her maiden name, adding the term "Amma" instead of the surname, after their initiation ceremony. All male members of a *tarwad* share the same surname: for example, the surname of Marayil members is Menon. However, since the same surname is used by many *tarwad* among the Nâyars, it does not necessarily indicate common descent lines.

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thorns and planted with big-leaved plantains, flowering bushes such as the hibiscus, and tall, slender arecanut palms, their graceful, shining trunks entwined with betel and pepper creepers. Here and there, a red tiled roof denotes the dwelling of some high-caste person, while elsewhere, the thatched roofs of the ordinary houses reveal the low social status of the majority.

Red laterite dust roads criss-cross this green scenery, highways and lesser paths upon which a continual stream of men and women, scantily clad in white, are forever on the move. Dry river beds in the spring and swollen, muddy torrents in the monsoon season, are crossed together with the broad expanse of calm, smooth backwaters on the way east to the inland red laterite hills. It is here that the majority of the terraced paddy fields are met with, green and flooded in the summer and dried up, with tufts of yellow straw stalks the rest of the year, their fringes strewn with rustling, restless coconut trees.

2. MYTHOLOGICAL BACKGROUND AND HISTORY

Hindu Brahmin tradition has it, so I heard from my informants in this region, that Kerala (*Malayalam* or *Keralabhumi* as it is called in the *Keralolpatti* and *Kerala Mahatmyam* chronicles) was created from the sea by Parasu Raman, the axe-wielding avatar of the god Vishnu, and given to those Brahmins called Nambudri for their perpetual possession and enjoyment. The myth, to which even the modern Hindu inhabitants of Kerala subscribe, is no doubt symbolic of two things: the geological origin of the land at the foot of the Ghats, which appears really to have been uncovered from the sea in some ancient natural upheaval, and the colonization of Kerala by Aryan invaders from the north in a remote and ill-defined past.

The mythological tale, in detail, is that Parasu Raman was once ordered by his father to kill his mother, because the latter had been seen by her husband smiling at a youth when she was fetching water at the well. The son, in filial obedience to his father, carried out the order, but having done so, attempted in every possible way to atone for the abominable crime of matricide. He consulted Brahmins who requested of him that he exterminate twenty two generations of the rival warrior caste of Kshattriyas. This he did, but the Brahmins were not satisfied. Parasu Raman then climbed the Western Ghats and, from the highest point, cast his axe into the sea calling upon it to withdraw, which it did. The land of Kerala thus came into existence and Vishnu's avatar, the

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177 of Vasco da Gama and Albuquerque, is one of those coins
 301 which, having found favour with a people, is used per-
 sistently in ornamentation long after it has passed out of
 currency. So fond are the Malayālis of the sequin that to
 this day there is quite a large trade in imitations of the
 coin for purposes of ornament. Such is the persistence
 of its use that the trade extends to brass and even copper
 imitation of the sequins. The former are often seen to
 ● (554) bear the legend 'Made in Austria.' The Nāyars wear
 none but the gold sequins. The brass imitations are
 worn by the women of the inferior races. If one asks the
 ordinary Malayāli, say a Nāyar, what persons are repre-
 sented on the sequin, one gets for answer that they are
 Rāma and Sita ; between them a cocoanut tree."

301 In connection with the wearing of charms by Nāyars
 789 Mr. Fawcett writes as follows. "One individual (a
 777 Kiriattil Nāyar) wore two rings made of an amalgamation
 [325] of gold and copper, called tambāk, on the ring finger of
 the right hand for good luck. Tambāk rings are lucky
 rings. It is a good thing to wash the face with the hand,
 on which is a tambāk ring. Another wore two rings of
 the pattern called trilōham (lit. metals) on the ring finger
 of each hand. Each of these was made during an eclipse.

301 Yet another wore a silver ring as a vow, which was to be
 789 given up at the next festival at Kottiūr, a famous festival
 782 in North Malabar. The right nostril of a Sūdra Nāyar
 (304) was slit vertically as if for the insertion of a jewel. His
 mother miscarried in her first pregnancy, so, according
 to custom, he, the child of her second pregnancy, had
 his nose slit. Another wore a silver bangle. He had a
 wound in his arm which was long in healing, so he made
 a vow to the god at Tirupati (in the North Arcot dis-
 trict), that, if his arm was healed, he would give up the
 bangle at the Tirupati temple. He intended to send the
 bangle there by a messenger.

121 complex, contradictory, and difficult material collected by many au-
611 thors, and, second, to test the Ceylon model of the association of hy-
564 pergamy with unilineal descent. It will be recalled that Gough's Kum-
bapettai village seemed to include the variations in kinship found
dispersed over a large area in Ceylon. On the Malabar coast, the situa-
tion is, if possible, made even more complicated: in this famous re-
gion we find every possible variation of our model, from matrilineal
hypergamous systems to endogamous and patrilineal hypergamous
systems, all existing pell-mell in the same area. In general, it seems
clear that these various features are used as structural indices to dis-
tinguish communities from one another. The over-all pattern, by con-
• [554] trast, seems uncluttered: in lower levels of social rank we find, on the
whole, endogamous castes which so far as the material goes exhibit the
fundamental characteristics of the general structure. In the higher
levels of Hindu and Muslim society we find an intense preoccupation
with status and social rank, and unilineal descent systems are built out
of the general structure. Then, in the limiting cases, each matrilineage
behaves as if it were a single unique caste having only hypergamous
connections with the outside world.

In this section, I shall first attempt to establish the existence of the
general structure in castes in both North and South Malabar, and I
shall then go on to examine the questions of descent and hypergamy.

[197] Before we come to specific cases, I should observe that the region ex-
[171] hibits an impressive general cultural uniformity: the language, Malay-
alam, is very closely related to Tamil; the details of the customs find
immediate echoes not only in the material from the rest of South In-
dia but among Buddhists in Ceylon as well. Quite apart from struc-
[184] tural matters, there is an intuitive appreciation of the fact that we
are in a civilization with a distinctive style of its own in which the
different customs of discrete groups appear as permutations and
combinations of the same set of general ideas.

101 The term Nayar covers a motley collection of categories of people.
564 Primarily, they are aristocratic Nayar descended from the important
royal houses of Cochin and Travancore. There are also people of
servant castes who have allegedly taken on the Nayar title in the last
century and are only Nayar by courtesy. Some of these categories may
be fully endogamous and others, at the higher levels, hypergamous.
Though there are again uniformities, it is important to specify which
group of Nayar are being considered. The word *taravad*, used by
613 various castes in Malabar, denotes a group of matrilineally related
persons with the same name who observe rules of exogamy. The
taravad may be split into smaller property-holding groups, each with a
head *Karanavan*.⁷

⁷ "One who 'acts'": comp. *Karanava*, "to do" in Sinhalese.

NORTH NAYAR

Anthropological investigations in Malabar have usually gone straight 613
to the most spectacular cases: the matrilineal Nayar *taravad* of 114
Cochin and Travancore. This tendency, though understandable, is
hardly justified, since the matrilineal *taravad* achieves its greatest
elaboration among the aristocratic ranks of the ruling families and
can hardly be accepted as a typical feature of the landscape.

It should be clear that today there is great variation in practice 613
among the Nayar groups in Malabar, not only from the aristocrats to 114
the low-caste menials (who like to call themselves Nayar) but also 184
within the same Nayar "subcastes." In an illuminating passage, Karve [554] •
(1953), for example, notes how many individual Nayar feel that they
should lay the foundations for a new *taravad* in their sister's name as
soon as they can afford to do so, for a named matrilineal *taravad* is
clearly an important aspect of status for Nayar men. Gough (1952a)
has used a historical model to deal with the variations. She argues, in
effect, that the past was orderly and the present is confused. Theory
and practice were harmonious in the past but are now breaking down.
The tempo of new developments, political, economic, social, can
hardly be denied, but we can suggest that the past idealized by Gough
may well have been as diverse (in terms of the structure of matrilineal
taravad) as the present. It is likely that there always were nascent,
medium-sized, and fully developed *taravad* based on the same princi-
ples.

We shall examine the aristocratic Nayar lineages in a moment. In 613
North Malabar, the *taravad* is significantly different from the region [184]
around the Cochin kingdoms. In the North, there was apparently less
political centralization and a relatively limited development of sub-
categories of Nayar castes with special duties. Most of the Nayar were
called Nambiar and were small landowners who lived in villages.
They recognized dispersed matrilineal clans, and the property group [614]
in the locality was regarded as a segment of such a clan.

At marriage the girl moved to the household of her husband, but 591
she returned temporarily to her natal household to bear her children [844]
(a custom still followed among the Sinhalese). The children when [191]
grown went to their MB; the males stayed with the MB as members of [851]
matrilineal and the females were married off from that house. [613]

Here, clearly, are the complex claims on the sister and her children. 601
I need hardly point out that all aspects of the general structure are [602]
to be seen in their organization. First, the usual Dravidian terminology
was used for reference (Schneider and Gough, 1961, p. 404). A clear
distinction was made between the categories for reference and the

121 scent groups may be generally placed in the highest categories and
564 still be connected by a chain of descending unions with such categories
611 as the Sudra. To recall the situation in Ceylon, such groups as the
[171] Karava (Fishers), who are usually seen as a "separate" caste in other
parts of the island, are associated with the hierarchy of Vellalar
matrilineal descent groups on the eastern littoral. Thus, in the Mala-
bar context, too, a category such as Nayar covers a wide spectrum of
ranked descent groups. Gough suggests that apart from the royal
matrilineages of the various kingdoms, it is possible to detect five
subcategories of Nayar groups (1961, pp. 308-309): (a) Kiriattil and
Vellayma Nayar, (b) Puratta Charna (Outdoor Retainers) Nayar (but
these have subdivisions such as Pariccha Menon (Leaders of the
Shield), (c) Agatta Charna (Indoor Retainers) Nayar, (d) Pallichan
Nayar, and (e) Sudra Nayar. This is not a hard and fast hierarchy
and we are told (p. 309) that "In some districts they ranked in the
order given and men of the higher [category] might marry women of
the lower [category]; the reverse was in theory forbidden. In other
districts the [categories] seem to have disputed for precedence and
not to have regularly intermarried" (my italics).

121 It is clear that in this system it is possible, for instance, to have
564 at the top a single matrilineage whose men may be connected to a
613 small group of matrilineages who are equals and who marry among
themselves. They in turn may be connected with a larger group of
matrilineages of a still lower caste, and so on. Furthermore, actual
sambandam connections may or may not be systematically established
between the levels. As long as the principles are clear, it hardly mat-
ters what the status-bearing groups are called: in widening circles we
have the matrilineage, which may be part of a hypergamous cluster
(category), which in turn may be part of a more inclusive "subcaste"
or indeed an endogamous caste.

121 Also in the Cochin region, according to Gough (1961, p. 319), hy-
114 pergamy is a custom of the aristocratic matrilineages and is associated
564 with the prestige of unilineal descent, whereas in the levels "below
613 the Nayar temple menials" the categories were endogamous "as is
usual in the caste system throughout India."

[833] Why hypergamy at the aristocratic levels? Gough in answer to this
[554] question has taken a curious combination of materialist-psychoana-
lytic arguments: it is her theory that hypergamy accords with the
power structure of the political system and with the special reasons
why virgins must be deflowered by powerful men before they are
safe for ordinary mortals (see Gough 1953a and 1961, *passim*).

Dumont has proposed an important, but very different, answer. He
notes rightly that the most powerful and superior Nayar lineage still
had hypergamous connections with Brahman who were ritually su-